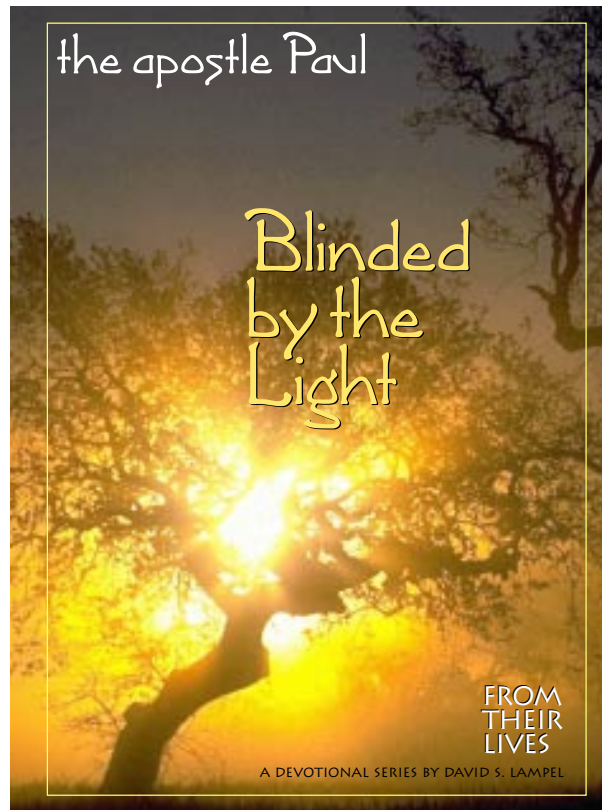


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COME ALONG WITH ME ON A TRIP TO OUR PAST.

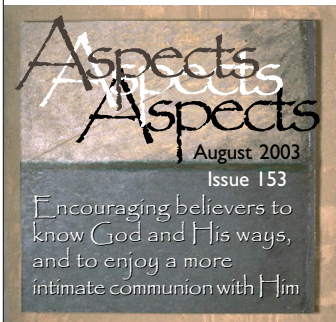
It will be a journey of rediscovery, one in which  
old familiar sites are revisited and  
seen as if through new eyes.

# Time with an Old Friend

Welcome on this trip are certainly those new to faith, new to this life of sanctification through the blood of God's Son. You may see sights and learn things heretofore unimagined.

But the invitation is extended particularly to those *old* in the faith—those on whom the crust of religion has built up like a suit of heavy, rusted armor. This is the group to which I belong, a group whose members are of sincere but possibly calloused hearts, to whom religion has become so familiar that it may have become something monotonous—even trite. For members of this group the familiar *lingua franca* of the church now rolls trippingly, flawlessly, sometimes meaninglessly off the tongue. Life in Christ may have become something automatic, performed without thought, and dull.

One need not be of advanced years to belong to this group. Its membership includes those who began so young that while still young they have grown inured to the habits of faith, its customs and practices, traditions and phrases. The church is as much in their bloodstream as if it had come as part of their DNA: natural, and



familiar beyond the point of memory. It is a happy circumstance to begin so young in the ways of the Lord, but it is a circumstance fraught with the perils of eventual boredom, and ennui.

So come along with me, and together we will be revived from the river of life that flows from the throne. We will become reacquainted with our Savior—the one whose name we bear.

*But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him... Philippians 3:7-9a*

He is quite a remarkable person, you know. Everything of God, yet the only member of the Godhead to have experienced the earthiness of flesh, Jesus can rightly be called a *person*. As such, He

is our brother, our experienced advocate, our friend. More than that, however, Jesus is the one in whom we find all lessons for living. To take the name “Christian” means to be a “follower of Christ.” We do not go before Jesus, leading Him, for He has already paved the way; we do not walk alongside Jesus, shoulder-to-shoulder as an equal, for though He is our brother, He is still very God; but we follow *behind* Jesus, keeping Him in full view, observing His ways and—as much as flesh can, according to the condition of the heart—imitating His life.

So let us rediscover the essence of Christ. Let us return to our hometown, and find the street on which His family has always lived. The house will not be hard to find; the porch light will be on, since He has been expecting us. We will knock on their old screen door, and when He comes to the door and greets us with inviting affection (which He most certainly will), let us sit together and listen to Jesus tell us of His life, His ways, and His timeless ideas.

## Best Friend

We turn down the street and immediately the memories come flooding back. The old oak and maple trees that grow between sidewalk and pavement are now taller and fatter, but their shapes and placement are familiar to us. In and around them we played tag, and we climbed in their lower branches to impress each other, and to hang our makeshift swings. Every autumn we helped our dads rake up the fallen leaves into huge piles—and then we scattered them again across the lawn as we took turns leaping into the fragrant, dusty piles.

Those were carefree days, days of unfettered joy and abandon, and we feel a sudden twinge of regret that those days seem now to be over. Our lives have become complicated and obtuse, pulled here and there by competing demands. As adults we have learned not only to be cautious, but suspicious; good humor has turned into dark irony, even ugly sarcasm. We have learned the art of the “firm handshake,” the “appropriate response,” the “diplomatic reply,” and we have forgotten what it was to be transparent and real with our friends.

And, especially, our *best* friend.

He lived right next door. In fact, our second-floor bedroom window faced his, and over the years that short distance was bridged by a succession of connections: first, two tin cans connected by taut string; then a pulley system for exchanging secret notes; then, later, wireless walkie-talkies, over which we talked with each other into the late hours from under our bed covers. With our best friend we shared our loftiest aspirations, the most intimate details of our hopes and dreams, our darkest fears. There were times when we may have hesitated to share a most frightening thought, but only for a moment, for we loved our friend, and couldn't bear the

thought of *not* sharing our life with him.

It was with our best friend that we explored the secret places in our small hometown—small tucked away places known only to children and the incurably curious. In company with our best friend the tiny creek that bordered the neighborhood playground became the mysterious Nile, filled with man-eating crocodiles. At other times it became the rough-and-tumble Caribbean, with threatening pirates hiding around every bend. With our friend we were free to let our imagination soar, to dream large dreams, and to dare to become something grand—even spectacular.

Now, of course, we have become too old for such things. Now our best friend is lost somewhere in the pages of our high school yearbook, and no one ever replaced him. Now we have many “friends,” but very few in whom we might confide our intimacies—and none with whom we would dare bare our soul. We have become sophisticated, self-reliant, and we suppose that we no longer need intimate friends as we did during our younger years. Tragedies are borne silently, alone, and infrequent joys embarrass us, for it would seem that only children enjoy the freedom of expressing uninhibited joy.

So we have returned to our old home town, to the street on which we once lived. The daylight is dimming, and the overhanging trees dim further the ambient light, leaving a tranquil dusk. We, of course, go first to the house in which we were born and raised. The front porch has been changed, and the house is now colored an odd green, instead of the white it once was. Familiar bushes are now gone or overgrown, and strange toys litter the front yard. But the exterior of the house is still recognizable as ours, and we wonder what our old bedroom looks like now.

The house next door stands in remarkable contrast to ours. A first glance reveals that it is unchanged, and even beyond the first glance it reveals that every detail is precisely as we have always remembered it. The color of its siding is the same; the location and shape of every shrub bordering its foundation are unchanged; even the darker colored trim is peeled and needing fresh paint in places

we remember from childhood. It is as if we are looking at a decades-old image from a photograph album. Nothing—absolutely nothing has changed.

The porch light over the screen door is on—the only one in the entire neighborhood—like a small beacon leading us into safe harbor.

## Nurturing a Priceless Gift

To make contact with God the Father (on a metaphorical level), we must reach *up*, for God has never left His throne in heaven. To make contact with the Holy Spirit, we must reach *inward*, for though He moves effortlessly between heaven and earth, the Spirit dwells within our grasp in our own, internal God-space. But to make contact with Jesus, we must reach *out*, for though He dwells right now, physically, in heaven (at God the Father's right hand), Jesus is that part of God most like ourselves. As such, He walks in our shoes; He has experienced the limitations of flesh; and He understands the way we think.

Too seldom do we take advantage of this priceless gift: the steadfast friendship of our Lord Jesus. There never has been anyone like Him. He is undiminished God, yet—as Jesus explained to His disciples—He “...did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He now sits at the exalted right hand of God, where the inhabitants of heaven worship Him as The Lamb, yet His occupation in that seat is to act as our constant advocate to the Father.

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1*

The term “Christ” means that Jesus is the Anointed One, or Messiah, yet after His resurrection, instead of immediately taking

his rightful place upon the throne of earth, He returned to the Father—and to His place in our hearts—where He shares with all of us His kingly riches.

*The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Romans 8:16-17a*

We call Jesus “Lord”—which He certainly is—but instead of living in a castle on a hill, where He might “lord it over” his lowly, miserable serfs, Jesus lives *with* us, in the house just next door, and He spends His hours walking with us, talking with us, and loving us—each one of us as an individual.

But we have been away from Him for a while. Oh, not that we have forgotten Him, or failed to write from time to time. But we have, admittedly, neglected the relationship, relying for far too long on mutual history to sustain the friendship. We have assumed—quite correctly—that our old friend would always be there, no matter what, so it has become convenient to set aside the nurturing of this relationship in favor of those more fragile. Knowing Jesus as we do, we knew He would forgive our bad manners.

Friendship, however, like a sound marriage (a not inappropriate comparison in this case), must be nurtured and fed. Attention to it must be paid. A measure of effort must be expended to sustain the active, healthy, intimate relationship.

*I come to the garden alone,  
While the dew is still on the roses;  
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear;  
The Son of God discloses.*

*He speaks, and the sound of His voice  
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing,  
And the melody that He gave to me,  
Within my heart is ringing.*

*I'd stay in the garden with Him  
Though the night around me be falling,  
But He bids me go; through the voice of woe,  
His voice to me is calling.*

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own,  
And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.*

(C. Austin Miles)



## Good Manners

Jesus invites us inside with an affectionate embrace, and immediately we are in familiar surroundings. Every house has its smell, and the home in which Jesus lives bears the mingled aromas of good food and warm hospitality. Every other house smells of the family living within, but Jesus' home smells of the co-mingled aromas of everyone who has ever visited. Something of every previous guest lingers so they will feel at home upon their return.

The living room furniture is familiar to us, and we remember every detail from our childhood: the overstuffed chair that molds itself to our bottom, its arms slightly worn from use; the old rug that around its edge reveals the hardwood floor beneath; the same pictures hanging on the walls. Everything is clean without being sterile, tidy without being fussy. It is a room in which we are comfortable removing our shoes.

Jesus conducts us to the best chair in the room and offers us a glass of tea. And it takes no time at all for us to be reminded why Jesus is our dearest friend. The better qualities of a friend too often become corrupted in our relationships with others. We've seen it not only in our closest friends, but also in ourselves. Initial diplomacy and plastic manners are offensive when displayed late in a relationship. Honesty is admirable, but few like to live with the unceasing woes of someone who carries transparency to the extreme. And there is little to recommend a friend for whom the sweetest sound is the sound of his own voice. Because humans are imperfect, friendships between them are imperfect—and we should expect no better.

But friendship with Jesus is different, for in it at least half of the relationship is perfect. Jesus doesn't stop being polite, but He never displays any of the plastic manners so common to us. We can be agreeable for effect, or to gain someone's favor, but Jesus is agreeable because that is who He is.

*"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."  
Matthew 11:29*

Yet even with His good manners, that quality in Jesus never degenerates into an insipid cordiality that never asks to have its own way. He is never a milquetoast.

*And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." John 2:14-16*

Our sense of comfort in Jesus' presence is based on the knowledge that His honesty is authentic, and based on truth. We don't mind occasional discipline, but we mind very much being either patronized or abused. Put simply, we know that Jesus will never yell at us unless we really deserve it.

For many people the grace of Jesus begins and ends at the cross. To them, "grace" is synonymous only with "undeserved salvation." But Jesus not only demonstrated God's grace in His sacrificial act at Calvary, He *behaves graciously* in His relationships with those who are friends with Him through that act. For those who live next door to Jesus, every day is filled to overflowing with His grace. Jesus never is too busy, never too distracted to be a part of our sorrows or joys. His friendship is constant, never wavering. His humanness means that His part of the relationship is compassionate and tactile; His deity means that He can be this to *everyone*, beyond the limitations of place or time.

It was not just for the pages of His word that God became man in Jesus. It was for the millions upon millions of those who would answer His call, that they would know His strength combined with grace, His authentic transparency, and the tenderness of His heart.

---

*I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend!  
He loved me ere I knew Him;  
He drew me with the cords of love,  
And thus He bound me to Him.  
And round my heart still closely twine  
Those ties which naught can sever,  
For I am His and He is mine,  
Forever and forever.*

*I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend!  
He bled, He died to save me;  
And not alone the gift of life,  
But His own self He gave me.  
Naught that I have my own I call,  
I hold it for the Giver;  
My heart, my strength, my life, my all,  
Are His, and His forever.*

*I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend!  
So kind, and true, and tender,  
So wise a Counselor and Guide,  
So mighty a Defender!  
From Him who loves me now so well,  
What power my soul can sever?  
Shall life or death, or earth or hell?  
No; I am His forever.*

*(James G. Small)*

## Are you a friend to Jesus?

*Why, yes, you say. I know Him personally.  
Jesus is my personal Savior. He's my friend...*

Jesus is all the world to me,  
My life, my joy, my all;  
He is my strength from day to day,  
Without Him I would fall.  
When I am sad to Him I go,  
No other one can cheer me so;  
When I am sad He makes me glad,  
He's my friend.

(Will L. Thompson)

Okay, that answers the question: Is Jesus a friend to *you*? But are *you* a friend to Jesus?

*Well, sure, you say. I have publicly associated myself with Him. I have acknowledged Jesus as my Savior and Lord. I am a part of His body, the church. He is Lord.*

That's an important stand to take. But that answers the question: Are you a friend of Jesus? Let's try it one more time: Are you a friend to Jesus?

*What's the difference?* you ask.

Do you really *know* Him, or just know who He is? Do you care about Jesus as you do your best friend—comforting, caring, sustaining, cheering? Do you feel His pain as intensely as your own? Could Jesus sing that verse about you?

\_\_\_\_\_ is all the world to me,  
My life, my joy, my all;  
She is my strength from day to day,  
Without her I would fall.  
When I am sad to her I go,  
No other one can cheer me so;  
When I am sad \_\_\_\_\_ makes me glad,  
She's my friend.

There is no verse in the Bible that calls for us to "make Jesus our personal Savior" or "accept Him as our personal Savior." Jesus is, indeed, a very personal, intimate Savior—a fact that has little to do with us, but everything to do with Him.

Jesus has never been a Wizard of Oz kind of Lord. He has never set Himself apart from us with flashing fire, crashing gong and billows of rolling smoke. He has never secreted Himself in a closet to push buttons and pull levers on our behalf. Jesus is a close, intimate, hands-on kind of Lord.

We already have a God we cannot touch. Our heavenly Father is unspeakable holiness, in the presence of which Isaiah exclaimed: "I am about to die!" (Isaiah 6) But with His holiness, God the Father still desired a personal relationship with His children, so He sent Jesus to be that point of contact.

Time and again Jesus demonstrates this personal aspect of His nature:

Dining with the sinners at Matthew's house, touching the leper in order to heal him, physically throwing the money-changers out of the temple and overturning their tables. We can hear it even on the road to Damascus. Saul has been actively pursuing and murdering those who follow Jesus, when he is stopped and struck blind by the light of Christ. Again, it is personal, when Jesus asks him: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (emphasis added)

Jesus was given so that we might touch God. He was given so that God could more personally touch us. The very existence of Jesus in the eternal tapestry speaks of God loving His people. Jesus is a touchable Lord.

But how can we call Jesus Lord, if we don't understand what He went through to become our Savior? How can we say He is our personal Savior when we haven't walked alongside Him, felt His pain, wiped the sweat and blood from His brow?

There is not just one kind of relationship with Christ—just as there is not just one kind of relationship with God. There is milk, and there is meat. You can call yourself a Christian—and be one—and still keep Jesus at arm's length. You can acknowledge the fact that He is God, and that He died for your sins, and still not know Him very well.

So I ask again: Are you a friend to Jesus?

## The Advocate

The human experience, especially in its relationship with God, is a rich cornucopia of possibilities. No one may dictate to another the precise manner in which they respond to and commune with God, for it is an unregulated process—save for the one, entryway essential:

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." John 14:6*

There are many reasons why God is manifested to us in three associated yet distinct ways, but those reasons can be distilled down

to two: each member of the Godhead has His own unique ministry, and each person has his or her unique needs that draw upon those three ministries in different ways.

God the Father is unspeakable, unimaginable holiness. He cannot be seen by mortal humans, and His purity is such that it cannot be approached by sinful man.

*The Lord also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all*

*the people. You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."* Exodus 19:10-13

God the Spirit is just as holy, and though His effects may be more evident, He remains as invisible and untouchable as the Father to mortal man. In fact, there is a special way in which the Holy Spirit is set apart from sinful man, and unique even within the Godhead, as Jesus explained:

*"Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."* Matthew 12:31-32

God the Son is as holy and pure as the Father and the Spirit, yet in that eternal, uncreated Tri-unity He is unique in that He is approachable in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God getting His hands dirty. His earthiness did not diminish His deity, nor did His deity dilute the authenticity of His unassuming personality. He never ceased being God, but He translated God into a language we could understand. The full personality of the Godhead dwells in all its component parts. God the Father is holy; Jesus the Son is holy; the Spirit is holy.

*"I and the Father are one."* John 10:30

Because God cannot be anything but who He is, the full complement of His attributes is shared by all three members of the Trinity. But in His wisdom, God "sent forth His Son" so that when we needed holiness packaged in earthly form we would have Jesus. When we needed an understanding shoulder to lean on, we would have Jesus. When we feel abandoned and hopelessly confused, we would have Jesus.

We cannot dictate the form and method of another's communion with God, but during times of struggle, during times of pain and strife, during times in which despair threatens to overwhelm us—in times of profound need, the face of God is the face of Jesus. The Spirit may be the "Comforter," but when we need someone more tangible, more tactile, to pour out our troubled soul to, it is the face of Jesus that comes to our visions. It is His hand we feel upon our shoulder.

In a courtroom every defendant has beside him his lawyer—his advocate. And, whether guilty of the crime or no, it is his advocate's hand on his shoulder when the verdict is read. Jesus, as our supreme Advocate before the Father, is there to comfort us in our times of trial. In our eyes we may be deserving judgment; we are guilty before the bar of justice. But, as a Christian redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, in the eyes of the Father we are innocent. The Judge has no verdict of condemnation to hand down. In conference Jesus has already leaned over the Judge's desk and said, "He is Mine. The record is expunged." And the Judge has gavelled, "Case dismissed!"

Then why do we need our Advocate beside us? We need Him for comfort and defense against our own insecurities. And it is our insecurities that have brought us back to our hometown, to the street on which we once lived, to the home of our old friend and companion.

MY SOUL WAS IN RAPTURES WHEN I MUSED YESTERDAY UPON TWO SWEET THOUGHTS; THEY ARE BUT SIMPLE AND PLAIN, BUT THEY WERE VERY INTERESTING TO ME. I THOUGHT THAT HAD I TO INTERCEDE FOR ANYBODY, AND DO A MEDIATING PART, IF I HAD TO INTERCEDE FOR MY BROTHER WITH MY FATHER, I SHOULD FEEL I HAD GOT A SAFE CASE IN HAND. THIS IS JUST WHAT JESUS HAS TO DO. HE HAS TO INTERCEDE WITH HIS FATHER, AND MARK, WITH OUR FATHER TOO. THERE IS A DOUBLE PRECEDENT TO STRENGTHEN OUR CONFIDENCE THAT HE MUST PREVAIL. WHEN CHRIST PLEADS, HE DOES NOT PLEAD WITH ONE WHO IS STRONGER THAN HIM OR INIMICAL TO HIM, BUT WITH HIS OWN FATHER. "MY FATHER," SAITH HE "IT IS MY DELIGHT TO DO THY WILL AND IT IS THY DELIGHT TO DO MY WILL, I WILL THEN THAT THEY, WHOM THOU HAST GIVEN ME, BE WITH ME WHERE I AM." AND THEN HE ADDS THIS BLESSED ARGUMENT, "FATHER THOSE FOR

WHOM I PLEAD ARE THINE OWN CHILDREN, AND THOU LOVEST THEM AS MUCH AS I DO," YEA, "THOU HAST LOVED THEM AS THOU HAST LOVED ME." OH, IT IS NO HARD TASK TO PLEAD, WHEN YOU ARE PLEADING WITH A FATHER FOR A BROTHER, AND WHEN THE ADVOCATE CAN SAY, "I GO TO MY FATHER AND TO YOUR FATHER, TO MY GOD AND TO YOUR GOD." SUPPOSE, MY DEAR FRIENDS, THAT ANY OF YOU WERE ABOUT TO BE TRIED FOR YOUR LIFE, DO YOU THINK YOU COULD TRUST YOUR ADVOCACY WITH ANY MAN YOU KNOW? I DO REALLY THINK I SHOULD BE IMPATIENT TO SPEAK FOR MYSELF. BUT MY COUNSEL WOULD SAY, "NOW JUST BE QUIET, MY DEAR SIR, YOU PERHAPS MAY PLEAD MORE EARNESTLY THAN I CAN, BECAUSE IT IS FOR YOUR OWN LIFE, BUT THEN YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE LAW, YOU WILL MAKE SOME BLUNDER OR OTHER, AND COMMIT YOURSELF AND SPOIL YOUR OWN CAUSE." BUT STILL I THINK IF MY LIFE WERE IN HAZARD, AND I STOOD IN THE

DOCK, AND MY COUNSEL WERE PLEADING FOR ME, MY TONGUE WOULD BE ITCHING TO PLEAD FOR MYSELF, AND I SHOULD WANT TO GET UP AND JUST SAY, "MY LORD, I AM INNOCENT, INNOCENT AS THE BABE NEWLY BORN, OF THE CRIME LAID TO MY CHARGE. MY HANDS HAVE NEVER BEEN STAINED WITH THE BLOOD OF ANY MAN." OH! I THINK I COULD INDEED PLEAD IF I WERE PLEADING FOR MYSELF. BUT, DO YOU KNOW, I HAVE NEVER FELT THAT WITH REGARD TO CHRIST. I CAN SIT DOWN AND LET HIM PLEAD, AND I DO NOT WANT TO GET UP AND CONDUCT THE PLEADING MYSELF. I DO FEEL THAT HE LOVES ME BETTER THAN I LOVE MYSELF. MY CAUSE IS QUITE SAFE IN HIS HANDS, ESPECIALLY WHEN I REMEMBER AGAIN THAT HE PLEADS WITH MY FATHER, AND THAT HE IS HIS OWN FATHER'S BELOVED SON, AND THAT HE IS MY BROTHER—AND SUCH A BROTHER—A BROTHER BORN FOR ADVERSITY.

(CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON)

# The Real World

Evening has merged silently into night. The long shadows cast by the ancient oaks and elms that border the street of our old neighborhood have disappeared into an encompassing black broken only by the solitary street light and a smattering of other porch lights. In a polite society one does not overstay one's welcome. The hour is late, and while we sense no urgency on the part of our friend, reluctantly we rise to leave.

This world does hold a few special people—those in whose presence we are profoundly energized or affirmed. It is not impossible for that quality to dwell in flesh, for we have encountered one or two along the way. Their numbers, however, are few and dwindling. Today's culture does not encourage excellence of character—indeed, it goes out of its way to encourage a bland sameness, an egalitarian uniformity at the lowest common denominator. But in spite of society's pressures, a few do rise to a high and extraordinary level of excellence, and our lives are the better for time spent in their presence.

Yet time spent with any of these special people cannot even approach in quality or depth time spent with the Savior. Others may be able to energize our spirits, but only Jesus can revive our very soul. Others may reignite enthusiasm, but only Jesus can restore our passion for living with Him. Others may comfort or console, but only Jesus can unite our spirit with His and give us hope, and thus raise us up to where He dwells.

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42 niv*

We had returned to the street where we once lived to rediscover something that had been lost. Pleasantly, we had found it, but now it was time to depart.

"Good-bye, my good friend," we say, embracing Him at the door to His home.

"Why are you saying good-bye?"

"It's been wonderful visiting with You again. I had forgotten what it was like. But now I have to get back to my real life. It was well worth the trip, but I can't live in the past forever."

"But this isn't the past. It's now, and I'll be going with you. After all, I arrived with you."

"What?"

"You didn't really think that all this time I have been living where I was born, did you? It's a great place to visit—and I've enjoyed the memories. But I've been living with you all along! In fact, I'm the one who brought you back here."

"But, why?"

"You had forgotten that I was at your side. You were beginning to forget that I was your best friend. And I feared that you might even forget who I was. You're too dear to me to ever let that happen."

And, as if waking from a dream, my mind clears. I see the two houses from our past as they really are—just two old houses, just buildings that stand for a while, swapping families in and out, until they crumble into dust. The neighborhood is interchangeable with thousands more across the land, holding memories, but little more. It all belongs with the past—a past that was good, but no longer exists.

With a cleared mind I realize that the one standing by my side is more than just a childhood friend. He is my friend even *now*. He came with me through childhood, through adolescence, into perilous adulthood. He has been with me all along, holding me up, giving me hope.

He wraps His arm around me, and together we go down the front porch steps, down the sidewalk, and out of the old neighborhood where we had been young together. The sidewalk is uneven, broken by decades of weeds shooting up through the cracks. And leaving the faint illumination of the porch light, all becomes black around us. But we don't fear the way, for our feet never touch the ground.

---

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am His own,  
And the joy we share as we tarry there,  
None other has ever known.*



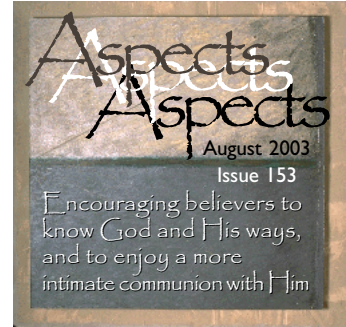


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Frequency: Monthly  
Editions: Print, Pdf, Ascii

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